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STATE FOR EUR A/S DAN FRIED AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2017

TAGS: PREL GG

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON RELEASE OF SOUTH OSSETIAN PEACEKEEPERS
AND ABKHAZ SOLDIERS DELIVERED

REF: STATE 141292

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On October 7 the Ambassador delivered reftel demarche to Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhushvili. The Ambassador recommended that the Georgians release the two Ossetians and the seven Abkhaz they are holding after separate incidents in September. Bezhushvili said he had already recommended the release to President Saakashvili. The Ambassador familiarized Bezhushvili with the arguments for release contained in reftel, and stressed the importance of releasing the prisoners as soon as possible.

¶2. (C) On October 8, the Ambassador raised the issue of the prisoners with President Saakashvili. Saakashvili said that the GOG is working toward release of the seven Abkhaz men. However, he was reluctant to promise the release of the South Ossetians, whom he described as "killers". He fears that if released, they will go back and start fighting Georgians again.

¶3. (C) Later on October 8, Bezhushvili informed the Ambassador that the Russian government had by that time been told that the Abkhaz will be released, after some remaining legal issues have been resolved. However, Bezhushvili said Georgia still regards the South Ossetians as Georgian citizens, and as such, the GOG has jurisdiction and may properly hold them in custody and try them for their alleged crimes. The GOR argues they are Russian citizens. The Georgians believe they must continue the prosecution of the South Ossetians to support their position that they are Georgian citizens subject to Georgian law.

¶4. (C) The Abkhaz remain in custody as of the afternoon of October 9 and we have no further information about when they may be released.

TEFFT